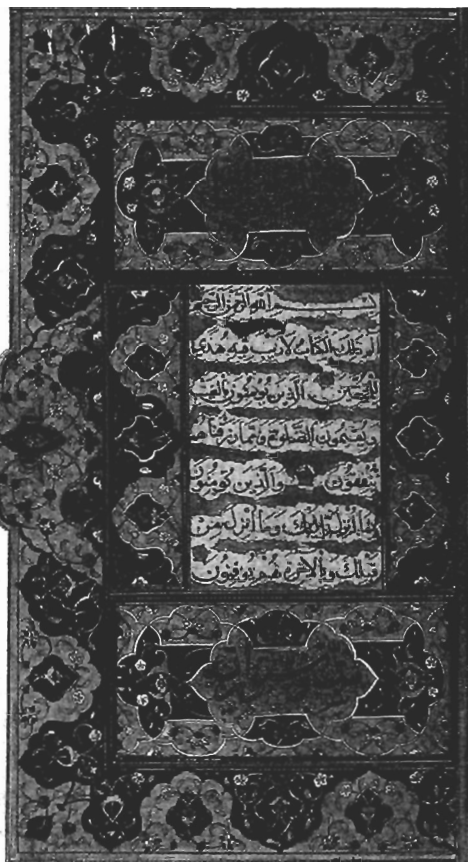
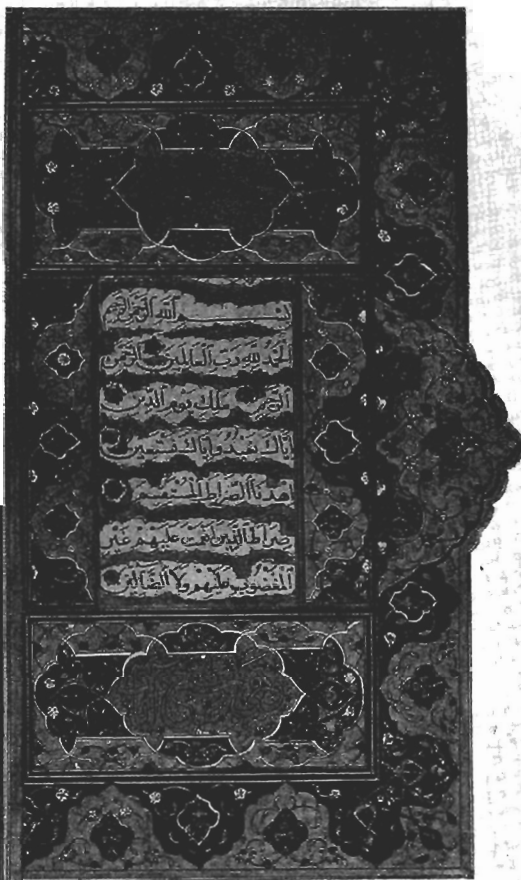


Readings in the Qur'an



*Selected
and
translated
by*
Kenneth Cragg



warnings! We have made the Qur'ān easy to remember: but is there anyone remembering?

The tribe of Thamūd belied the warnings. They said: 'Shall we follow a mere human, one of ourselves? To do so would be error and lunacy. Has the *Dhīkr* been delivered to him alone among us? Nay! but he is an insolent liar.'

They will know on the morrow who is the insolent liar! We are sending the she-camel as a test for them. Keep watch on them and hold yourself in patience. Tell them that the water is to be shared between them, each in supervised turns. Then they summoned their leader, who caught and slaughtered her. How dire was My punishment in the wake of My warnings. We brought upon them a single blast and they were as discarded twigs left by one who builds a sheepfold.

Indeed We have made the Qur'ān easy to remember: but is there anyone remembering?

Surah 54.18-32

RECALL Our servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, men of strength and vision, men We made altogether genuine in faith through their pure sense of the eternal world. Truly We count them the chosen and most excellent.

Surah 38.45-47

ALIF, Lām, Rā' — the signs of the Book which illumines. We have sent it down a Qur'ān in Arabic so that you (pl.) may take it in intelligently. In Our revealing this Qur'ān to you (s.) We give you in narrative the finest of stories — one of which you, with others, were quite unaware previously.

Joseph said to his father: 'Father, I saw eleven stars and the sun and moon in a dream and they were prostrating themselves before me.' To this his father replied: 'My son, do not tell your brothers what you have dreamed. They may concoct some plot against you. Satan is an avowed enemy to man. Your Lord is making choice of you to teach you the interpretation of events and dreams, perfecting His grace upon you and upon the house of Jacob, as in the past He did for your fathers, Abraham and Isaac. Wise and all-knowing is your Lord.'

There are, to be sure, many significant things in the story of Joseph and his brothers for those who are of enquiring mind.

'Our father,' observed the brothers, 'is much fonder of Joseph and his brother than he is of us — the whole lot of us. Our father is clearly under an aberration. Let us kill Joseph or get rid of him somewhere.' In that way, they told themselves, they would have their father's favour to

themselves. After the deed they could conduct themselves as right-dealing folk.

But one of them said: 'Do not kill Joseph. If you are really bent on action, find some pit and leave him there for some passing caravan to take him off.'

So they said to their father: 'Father, why not trust us with Joseph? In all honesty, we mean him well. Send him with us tomorrow for a jaunt and let him enjoy himself. We will take care of him.' Jacob answered: 'It distresses me to have you take him out with you. I fear some wolf may snatch him when you grow careless about protecting him.' To this the brothers said: 'If a wolf devours him — and we a whole band as we are — it would be over our dead bodies!'

They went off, and Joseph with them. They agreed on the plan to put him in a deep pit and there We revealed to Joseph that he would one day confront them with their deed when they had no idea who he was.

In the evening they came to his father with tears in their eyes and said: 'Father, we went off racing, leaving Joseph with our things. A wolf seized him. You will not believe us though we are telling you the very truth.' They showed him Joseph's shirt, stained with false blood. And Jacob said: 'I think it is not so: what you say has happened comes from the promptings of your own selves. Sweet fortitude, be mine! It is to God I turn for aid, faced with what you are telling me.'

Then there came a caravan whose water-carrier was sent with a bucket to draw. He cried: 'Bless us all! there is a lad in here!' They hid Joseph in their merchandise. God knew what they did. They sold him for a paltry price — a few dirhams counted out. For they set little store by him.

The man who purchased Joseph, an Egyptian, said to his wife: 'Give him a good lodging: maybe he will be useful to us and we may adopt him as a son.' So We gave Joseph a footing in the land in order to teach him the interpretation of storied happenings. God was working out His purpose, unaware of the fact as most people are. When Joseph reached manhood We conferred on him wisdom and knowledge, as Our way is with those whose lives are righteous.

The woman in whose house he lived schemed to entice him. She locked the doors and said: 'Come, I am yours.' But Joseph answered: 'God be my refuge. My master has been generous to me. Those who do evil will never prosper.' But she made for him madly and he would have taken her had he not seen a clear sign from his Lord, that We might keep him clear of evil and lust. He proved a loyal servant of Ours.

Both of them rushed to the door and she tore his tunic from behind. At the door, they met her husband. Whereupon she said: 'Is not imprison-

ment or some other dire punishment the due and proper way to deal with a fellow who tries to violate your own family?' Joseph said: 'It was she who tried to seduce me.' Then a witness from her own household commented: 'If his tunic is torn in the front, then she is speaking the truth and he is the one who is lying; but if it is torn from behind, she is the liar and he is telling the truth.'

When her husband saw that Joseph's tunic had been torn from behind, he said to her: 'This is some of your women's guile, and a pretty cunning one too! Joseph, keep clear of this kind of thing and you, madam, ask God's forgiveness for the sin you did, sinner that you are!'

Out in the city the women began to talk, putting the word around that the master's wife had fallen for her servant and had been soliciting him. 'She is a bad lot,' they were saying. When she had wind of their gossip, she sent to invite them to a banquet at her house. To every one of them she gave a knife and directed Joseph to present himself. Stunned with admiration when they saw him, they cut their hands, exclaiming: 'God preserve us! This is no mere human, this is some noble and angelic being.' 'Now you see,' she said, 'this is he you reproached me about. True, I tried to seduce him and he remained chaste. If he will not do as I require of him he will find himself in gaol, degraded.' To this Joseph responded: 'Lord, I would rather go to prison than submit to their advances. Unless You preserve me from their seductive snares, I will succumb and be numbered with the foolish.' His Lord heard his prayer and made him immune to their blandishments. For He hears and understands.

Nevertheless, in view of the signs given to them to that effect, they decided to put Joseph in prison for a while. With him there went to prison two young men, one of whom said to Joseph: 'I dreamed that I was pressing grapes,' while the other said: 'I dreamed that I was carrying bread on my head and the birds were eating it. Tell each of us the interpretation. It is evident to us that you are a man of parts and a good fellow.'

Joseph said: 'I will tell the meaning to each of you before the food arrives which is your daily sustenance. What I tell you is out of what my Lord has taught me. I have abandoned the community of those who do not believe in God and who, moreover, have no faith in the world to come. My community is that of the faith of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is our duty never to have other gods in the place of God in any form whatever. All this is the goodness of God to us and to all mankind. But most of humanity remain thankless. Tell me, fellow-prisoners, is a medley of gods better than God the One, the omnipotent?

Other objects of worship which you take instead of Him are nothing but names you have coined, you and your fathers. God has revealed no authority for them. Sovereignty belongs to none but God: He has commanded that you worship none but Him. That is true religion, even though most men do not know it.'

'My fellow-prisoners, one of you will again pour wine before his lord, while the other will be crucified and the birds will peck from off his head. That is the way the matter stands about which you enquired of me.'

To the one whom he expected to be freed Joseph said: 'Remember me when you stand before your lord.' But Satan caused him to forget to recall Joseph in mention to his lord. Thus Joseph remained in prison for a space of some years.

And the king said: 'I saw in a dream seven fat cattle and seven lean ones which ate them up; also seven green ears of corn and another seven which were dried up. Tell me, sages at my court, the meaning of what I have seen, if you can expound such dreams.' 'These are confusing dreams with no clues,' they answered, 'and, moreover, we have no skills to know what dreams mean.' It was then that the ex-prisoner, now freed, remembered Joseph after all the years, and he burst out: 'I will have the interpretation for you: give me leave to go.'

'Joseph,' he said, 'you are a man of truth; tell us about those seven fatted cattle which the seven lean ones devoured, and about the seven green ears of corn and the dried up ones, so that I can go back and report and the meaning will be known.' Joseph told him: 'For seven years running you will sow. At harvest time store the corn in the ear and eat only a little for your needs. For there will come seven barren years during which you will be consuming all that you have held in store, with little left. Then, following these years, there will come again a year when abundance will return and the vats will fill again.'

The king said: 'Bring the man into my presence.' But when the messenger came to summon him, Joseph said: 'Go back to your lord and ask him about the women who cut their hands. My master knows how crafty they were.' The king said to the women: 'Come clean about your action when you enticed Joseph: what about it?' 'God save us!' they said: 'we know nothing evil of him.' But the wife of his erstwhile master said: 'Now the truth is out at last: it was I who tried to seduce him. He is an upright man.' 'Hereby,' said Joseph, 'my master knows that I did not betray him behind his back. God does not guide the devices of tricksters. It is not that I want to justify myself. For the soul has an inward bias towards evil which would take over were it not for the mercy of my Lord, who indeed forgives and holds me in His mercy.'

The king said: 'Bring him here to me: I will have him serving in my entourage.' After talking with Joseph he declared: 'From now on you are in our trust and favour.' Whereupon Joseph said: 'Put me in charge of the storehouses of the land: I will be an intelligent custodian.' Thus did We establish Joseph in the land with complete authority throughout it. For We confer Our mercy on whom We will and never let the wages of the good to fail. The reward of the world to come is better still and it belongs to those who believe and are devoted to God.

The brothers of Joseph came and entered into his presence. He recognised who they were but they had no idea who he was. When he had arranged for their supplies, he added: 'And bring that brother of yours from your father! Giving you full measure you can see what an excellent host I am. But if you do not bring him back with you, there will be no measure for you at all again. I will not have you in my presence.' 'We will try,' they said, 'to get our father to let him come. That, for sure, we will do.'

Joseph directed his attendants to put their money in their saddle-bags, saying: 'They may well know what is meant by it when they get back to their families and come back here again.'

When they were once more with their father they said to him: 'Father, there is a ban on our buying corn. You have to send our brother down with us if we are to get anything. We will take every care of him.' But Jacob said: 'Shall I entrust him into your hands as once I entrusted his brother to you? There is no more sure guardian than God. He is the Lord of utmost mercy.'

When they opened their goods they found their money returned to them. They said: 'Father what more can we desire? Here is our money given back to us. We can go and secure what we need for our families and look well after our brother. We shall have an extra camel-load. It was a light load before.'

But Jacob replied: 'I will never let him go with you, unless you take a solemn oath before God to bring him back to me, failing only something dire which engulfs you all.' They gave him that solemn pledge and he said: 'God take your oath into His keeping,' and he added: 'My sons, do not go in all of you by one gate, when you arrive: go in by different gates. But there is no point in my giving you such orders. The whole is in God's power to dispose. It is in Him that I put my trust, where all trusting men must put theirs.'

They came in as their father had directed them. Within God's disposal of events Jacob's precaution did not achieve anything. But it met a need in Jacob's soul. Moreover, Jacob had insight into a secret which We had

indicated to him — the sort of knowledge which does not come to people in general.

When the brothers came into Joseph's presence, he embraced his own brother and said: 'I am your brother: do not grieve over what they did.' When he had provided them with provender he had his drinking-cup put into his own brother's saddle-bag.

Then the town-crier called out to them: 'Camel-drivers! you are surely thieves!' 'What is missing?' they asked, turning round to face those who spoke. 'The king's drinking-cup has gone,' was the reply: 'a camel-load of corn for the man who brings it back — my word for it!' 'In God's Name,' said the brothers, 'we did not come here to do evil in the land: we are no thieves.' 'And if you should be lying,' the men retorted, 'what then? What shall be done to the culprit?' They answered: 'Whoever is found with the cup in his saddle-bag will take the penalty. That is how we deal with criminals.'

Joseph went through all their saddle-bags coming finally to his brother's, from which he pulled out the cup. It was a design on Our part. Otherwise Joseph would have had no right, under the king's law, to detain his brother. Whom We will We exalt in honour: over every man of knowledge there is the One supreme Knower.

They said: 'If he has stolen it, a brother of his was a thief before him.' Still Joseph kept his secret and did not let them see anything. He said to them: 'Your own case is a worse evil: what you are referring to God knows well enough.' Then they said: 'O man of power, this brother here has a father who is a very old man. Take one of us in his place. You are a man of generous spirit — we can see that.' But Joseph replied: 'God forbid we should detain any man except the one with whom our property was found. For, otherwise, we would be doing a gross injustice.'

When they were in despair over him they went aside privately to confer. The eldest of them said: 'Your father, as you know full well, took from you a solemn pledge before God. Earlier you failed to keep faith with him over Joseph. Until I have my father's leave to do so I will on no account move from here — or until God gives me His verdict. There is no judgement to match His. You go back to your father and say to him: "Father, your son stole. We are only telling you what we know, being witnesses to it. Our power to stand guardians does not extend to things unseen. Ask in the city where we were and the camel-train in which we travelled. It is the truth we are telling you."'

'No!' cried Jacob, 'it is your doing in the evil of your hearts. Let me bear it with fortitude. It may be God will bring them all back to me. He is

ever wise and knowing.' He went away from them, crying: 'Alas! alas! for Joseph.' From the grief pent up in his heart his eyes flooded with tears. They said to him: 'In God's Name! You go on for ever reminding yourself of Joseph: you will wear yourself into the grave.' Jacob said: 'My grief and anguish cry out to God for answer: God has made me to know things beyond your knowledge. Go, my sons, search for word of Joseph and his brother. Do not lose hope of God's spirit. It is only those who deny the faith who despair of the spirit of God.'

So they came again to Joseph. When they had entered in before him they said: 'O man of power, great ill has befallen us and our families. We have come with money that is worth little. But give to us out of your charity, allowing to us the measure of our need. God rewards those who give in charity.'

'Do you know,' he asked, 'what you did to Joseph and his brother in your obduracy?' 'Are you then Joseph?' they cried. 'I am Joseph,' he said, 'and this is my brother. God has been very good to us. Whoever fears Him and holds out patiently, God does not let him miss the reward of the well-doers.' 'In God's Name,' they cried, 'we were indeed sinners and God has set you in honour over us.'

'No reproach shall be held against you today. May God forgive you. He is the Lord of utmost mercy. Go, take this shirt of mine and place it over my father's face to recover his sight and come back here to me with all your people.'

As their caravan was setting out, their father said: 'The breath of Joseph! I can scent it! though you will think that what I say is the folly of an old man.' 'By God,' said those who heard him, 'this is just your old illusion.'

When the messengers came with the happy news and the shirt was laid on Jacob's face his sight came back to him and he said: 'Did I not tell that I was told from God things you knew nothing of?' They answered: 'Father, ask forgiveness for us for the wrongs we did. What sinners we have been.' 'I will indeed ask forgiveness for you from my Lord,' he replied, 'He is ever forgiving and merciful.'

So when they arrived in Joseph's presence he embraced his parents and said: 'Come in into Egypt and dwell here in safety, if God wills.' He brought his parents up on to the royal dais and they all prostrated before him and he said: 'Father, you see what that vision of mine long ago signified. My Lord has made it all true. How good He was to me, bringing me out of prison and bringing you out of the wilderness when Satan had sown enmity between me and my brothers. My Lord deals graciously according to His will: for He is ever wise and knowing.' 'My

Lord, you have brought me to power and made me learned in interpretation of storied things — You who gave being to the heavens and the earth, my trusted guardian in this world and in the next. Let me die in true submission and belong in the fellowship of the righteous.'

All the foregoing which We reveal to you (s.) brings you word of the world that is unseen. You were not there to see when Joseph's brothers resolved together on their evil scheme. However eagerly you desire it otherwise, most men are not believers. You are not asking them to give you any reward for your message: it is simply and solely a reminder to the worlds. Many a sign there is in the heavens and in the earth, yet men pass them by heedlessly. The majority will only believe in God while they stay polytheists as well! Are they so sure they will be immune from the overwhelming chastisement of God and the Hour which will suddenly overtake them unawares?

Say: 'This is the way for me. I call you to God with a clear mind, I and those who follow me. Glory be to God: I am no worshipper of idols.'

Those whom We sent before your time as messengers were simply men whom We inspired from among the people of the cities.

Have they not travelled in the earth to see how those ended up who lived before them? Truly the mansion of the world to come is the better reward of those who hold God in awe. Do you still not understand? The messengers despaired, thinking themselves taken for nothing but liars, until Our help came to their rescue, delivering whom We willed. Evil-doing people do not elude Our power. In their histories is a salutary lesson for those with minds to take it in. This is not some forged tale but a confirmation of previous scriptures, and inclusive explanation, and guidance and mercy to believing people.

Surah 12.1-111

JOSEPH came to you earlier with clear evidences but you did not desist from your scepticism about what he brought to you. Indeed, even when he died you said: 'God will send no messenger after him.' Even so God leads astray the spendthrift and the sceptic.

Surah 40.34

TO Madyan We sent their brother, Shu'aib, who said: 'My people, worship God and anticipate the last Day: do not behave perversely, working corruption in the land.' But they belied his words. An earthquake overwhelmed them and in the morning they lay lifeless in their dwellings.

Surah 29.36-37